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Interview with José Ramón Núñez Editor-in-Chief of *Mester* XXII, vol. 2 (1993) Vice President of Instruction at Fullerton College

Ícaro Carvalho

***Mester*: Dear Professor Núñez, thank you for talking to us!**

José Ramón Núñez: Thank you for reaching out to me. I'm going to tell you something that you probably haven't noticed that is funny related to this, but I will tell you at the end.

***Mester*: How was *Mester* and the Department back then? We would love to know more about it.**

José Ramón Núñez: It was a strong department, strong according to the standards from UCLA. I can say that it wasn't easy to get in. But they provided a lot of support to the graduate students when we were there. I believe all of us received TA ships when we were there, and I enjoyed it. I was really grateful to be accepted because I was an older person, and I was a foreign student. UCLA accepted me, paid my international student fees, and, in addition to that, they gave me a job.

In my case, becoming the Editor-in-Chief was different than usual. Completely different. I'm going to tell you a story and I don't know if you want to publish this or not. What happened is that I was in my first year at UCLA—just got accepted at UCLA, getting a PhD and at the same time teaching Spanish 1. During my first quarter, the fall quarter, I volunteered to enter into the editorial board because I had a great training in picaresca, in literature of the 16th, 17th century in Spain, and also Medieval literature. So, I thought: "I'm going to offer my work if they want to, I can read articles and I can edit articles and make suggestions on everything." After a couple of months in the Editorial Board, the chair of the department, Professor Carroll Johnson, an expert in Don Quixote, called me to his office and told me "José Ramón, we need you to be the editor-in-chief next year." And I replied, "no, there is another student who has been here forever and, as a culmination of his time and work in the department, he has been already appointed, he has been selected by the editorial board and this student is going to be the editor." And he said, "No. Let me explain it to you: Mester is in bankruptcy."

"Every year, we have to put a lot of money into Mester because the subscriptions do not cover the cost of the printing of the journal. Because of that, we need to have someone who is going to be able to save, economically, the journal." He knew about me because I had another career before I came to the US to study for my PhD. I had experience in administration and education. And Professor Johnson continued: "If you are not the editor-in-chief, we are not going to put any money into the Mester fellowship."

I went to the editorial board, and specifically to the person who was going to be the editor in chief and explained that they could not force us to change the elected person, but they were going to cut the funding. I started asking questions and I found out that the major problem that the journal had was that the articles were sent, after edited, in paper to the printing company to be formatted, typed, and everything needed for publishing. And that was the major cost. Since I had some little experience with publishing, I went to Dr. Johnson and said that I needed a computer and a software capable of doing this. Just one computer and then a printer, a good printer. The cost would be the same as every year, but now it would be only once. From there, every year after that, the journal would be camera ready. We would send it to the print company, check costs, and find the cheapest way. So, he replied: "it's yours. Just do it." And that's how I became Mester Editor-in-Chief.

***Mester*: Thank you for doing that. We probably wouldn't have the journal right now if you haven't done that.**

José Ramón Núñez: And everybody, everybody, in the editorial board was in agreement. Nobody complained. Nobody got upset.

***Mester*: Do you believe that becoming Editor-in-Chief and also part of the editorial board helped your career after UCLA?**

José Ramón Núñez: This is another kind of funny story. Before going to UCLA, I had ten years of experience teaching Spanish in high school in Spain. Even though I had a lot of

experience teaching, there was a class intended for the new TAs who did not have experience teaching. It was a seminar taught by Professor Susan Schaeffer called "How to teach Spanish." I thought: "even though I have a lot of experience, it's always good to learn more things." This is one of the classes that helped me the most to get, three years later, a full-time job in a community college.

All the other work that I did, classes that I took, and the classes I taught, were also important. Nothing is unique.

First of all, after I finished the coursework at UCLA, I got some adjunct faculty positions in teaching Spanish in community colleges and Cal State also. Two years later, I got a full-time job teaching Spanish in a community college, where I also became the department chair in that college, Long Beach City College. After those 13 years, the position of Dean of Language Arts opened, where the Foreign Language department is; I applied, and I got it. It's due to my experience in administration. So, I will say, Mester helped—but also being department chair for many years in the same college helped me. Then, when the position in which I'm right now, the Vice President of Instruction at Fullerton College, opened, I applied, and I got it.

It is interesting to think that I got my PhD in Spanish Medieval literature and I have never taught it. I have never taught Spanish Medieval literature!

***Mester*: And looking back, would you have done anything differently when you were Editor-in-Chief?**

José Ramón Núñez: I would have done one thing differently.

Maybe don't put this in the interview because it's embarrassing. When we started getting the journal camera ready, we started trying different things. We had one editor who was an expert in publishing, so he was the editor in charge of designing the format. He started by the table of contents by adding funny names, like fake names. One of these names, one of them I will never forget, is Tito Puente. However, when the journal was ready, it was sent with the real table of contents, but the fake page with the fake editors ended up being sent to the printing company as well. So, in the physical journal, the fake page is printed, I believe it is on the back cover. It is funny that the printing company didn't know. They didn't check. They just printed as it was sent to them.

These things happen. That's probably the only thing I should have done differently. I should have checked it, even though I was not working in the Editorial Board any more.

***Mester*: Do you have any advice for the current Editorial Board?**

José Ramón Núñez: Advice is to enjoy it. Enjoy it. It's a great, great way to get to know people and to have access to serious research. Not everything that gets to the journal should be published, and even the best text can always be improved. So, my advice is to not be afraid of telling people "this is not good enough" or "it will be much better if . . ." So don't be afraid. The editorial board shouldn't be afraid. That's my recommendation.

Also, another event that happened during my time, when I started, that was the year of the earthquake—the big earthquake. We had to move to Royce, to a basement in Royce Hall.